

Howard County Human Rights Commission written testimony
Hiruy Hadgu
02/23/2021

I think the Commission should reconsider its position on the detention center, but any vote to cancel the contract by the commission is too little too late, unless reinforced with more substantive action.

I think the Commission should do the following:

1. The October 2020 IG report needs to be followed up by a county investigation. The Commission has authority to call for such an investigation. The Commission or an individual commission has the authority to direct this action. It is not enough to rely on the DHS investigation as the disposition and accountability of those findings do not fall on the county. The responsibility should begin and end with the county.
2. The report is clear about the Coalition and its position on ending the contract. While the Report explicitly identifies the opponents of the ICE contract, it does not say who the supporters are when it says "Supporters of the Contract raise two primary concerns with how termination of the Contract could adversely affect ICE detainees. One concern is that the termination of the Contract would make it harder for those currently in the custody of the HCDC to see their families. The other concern is that it would result in the transfer of detainees to detention centers that provide fewer services, including legal representation, to detainees than the HCDC."
 - a. The Immigration Committee's report needs to be amended to clarify who the supporters of the ICE contract are.
 - b. Furthermore, the report has enough information from the undocumented immigrants affected by the closure of the contract to refute both of these concerns. The report can and should do so do. The IG report should spell any notion that this facility is hospitable at any level.
3. The report includes over 60 pages of correspondence between a local attorney and the county. The local attorney has requested the following information under the Public Information Act.
 - a. A list of inmates and the nature of proceeding under which they were brought by ICE to Jessup
 - b. A list with the residential jurisdiction listed for each ICE inmate
 - c. A list of the length of time each ICE detainee spent at Jessup
 - d. A list of detainees turned over to ICE after finding non-immigration incarceration time at Jessup, with nature of crime, time spent in non-ICE detention at Jessup and time spent under ICE auspices at Jessup.

This attorney seems to have received the runaround from the county by throwing certain bureaucratic roadblocks to prevent the release of information. Even though there is clear evidence that the information requested is the public interest of an accountable government.

The report, instead of providing a clear narrative of these roadblocks simply concludes that the “the Coalition points to a Public Information Act request that has not been answered to the satisfaction of the Coalition.’

Here the Commission has a responsibility to call for the release of the information requested. No single individual should have to face this sort of roadblocks to get information that clearly needs to see the light.

4. Lastly, The commission can and should rescind its support of the policy change. As Mr. Markow stated in his November 21, email, “the county council may decide to codify this policy so that it cannot be easily rescinded by the next administration....”